

NRO REVIEW COMPLETED

19 September 1961

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS RE PROJECT CORONA

1. The evident Soviet intention to build a situation of extreme tension over Berlin, their systematic use of threats of nuclear attack, and the gravity of the choices likely to confront our Government under these circumstances, attach the utmost urgency to the requirement for intelligence on Soviet missile deployment during the next few months. CORONA is the most powerful available tool for this purpose. Additional CORONA flights between now and the end of the year can be launched only at the expense of one or both of the scheduled ARGON shots. Although improved geodetic information is greatly to be desired, it is believed that considerably less time urgency attaches to this need at least for targeting purposes. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that as many additional CORONA shots as possible be scheduled during the next four months and that one or both ARGON flights be postponed if necessary to accomplish this result.

2. The Committee is impressed with the evidence that the THOR-AGENA-CORONA triple prime system as a whole is beginning to be increasingly reliable. To achieve the present fairly high probability of complete success for a mission has required longer time and greater cost than was originally hoped. It is demonstrable that major changes in system configuration, however necessary as a part of the development process have introduced new sources of unreliability which have had painfully to be overcome. In the light of this history it must be anticipated that entirely new systems soon to be flown, notably the SAMOS subsystems, will likewise require extended periods of development before dependability is achieved. The Committee, therefore, believes that CORONA should be relied upon as the work horse while these other systems are in the development phase and that procurement planning should be based on this assumption. Specifically the Committee recommends that either through the ordering of long lead-time items beyond the present program or, if that is impossible, by ordering additional whole CORONA systems, a sufficient number of these systems should be available to meet basic satellite reconnaissance needs until more advanced systems have been proved.

Attachment to  
COR-1343